

## **Stephen Hunt:**

### **Civil War Veteran; Life centered upon St. Paul's**

Stephen P. Hunt's service as a Union soldier was marked by participation in one of the Civil War's bloodiest assaults, while his spiritual and social life was anchored at St. Paul's for more than half a century through his interment in the church yard in 1910.

Born in New York City on April 29, 1829, Stephen was a boy when his family purchased a farm near St. Paul's, growing up in the small town of Eastchester about 20 miles north of New York City. A congregant for nearly 70 years, he was married in the church June 17, 1852 to Caroline Crawford, a local resident, by the new rector Father William S. Coffey, whose tenure paralleled Hunt's attachment to the parish through the next century. Stephen learned carpentry in his teens, and was still listed as a carpenter, at age 75, in the Mt. Vernon 1904 City Directory.

While many young men from the St. Paul's vicinity enlisted with the Union forces in the fall of 1862, Stephen volunteered for the army in January 1864, when he was 33, slightly older than the average soldier. He and younger brother Ogden signed up with the Company C of the New York 8<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery the same day, indicating the family had decided it was time to join the effort to preserve the Union. Additionally, given his strong devotion to family, his wife Caroline's pregnancy with their second child during the recruitment drive of late 1862 -- a boy, Stephen D., was born in February 1863 -- influenced his decision to postpone military service. The distant mirror of an enlistment record offers a glimpse of Private Stephen Hunt in 1864 -- average height at 5' 5 1/2", with grey eyes, dark hair and a dark complexion.

Intended to protect the capital area, heavy artillery units were trained in the use of large siege canon, and Hunt's 8<sup>th</sup> N.Y.H.A. was stationed around Baltimore, experiencing minimal conflict. That changed in the spring of 1864. Union commander General Ulysses S. Grant launched the Overland campaign in Virginia, attacking the Confederate army under General Robert E. Lee seeking to conclude the war before the fall elections. Bolstering the Northern forces, the 8<sup>th</sup> New York and several additional heavy artillery regiments were reorganized as infantry units and joined the Army of the Potomac. Since they had suffered relatively few casualties, the heavies, as they were often called, were the largest regiments in the blue lines.



Part of the Second Corps, the 8<sup>th</sup> New York lurched forward on June 3 at the center of massive frontal assaults ordered by General Grant on Confederate lines at the Battle of Cold Harbor, only miles from Richmond. Sensing disaster, Union soldiers pinned slips of papers with names and addresses on their wool uniforms to help with identification after the battle. Fighting from trenches, the rebels repulsed several Northern attacks, inflicting catastrophic losses on the Yankee troops. Within an hour, the New Yorkers suffered more than 400 casualties, including their commander Colonel Peter Porter, the highest count for any regiment out of the 7,000 Union losses for the day, among the costliest attacks of the Civil War. While Hunt left no reaction to the slaughter, General Grant's comment

that “I regret this assault more than any one I have ever ordered,” records a sufficient, if understated, response of the surviving participants.

Private Hunt was among the fortunate who escaped injury, and marched in the ranks of the 8<sup>th</sup> heavies east around the Confederate position, reaching Petersburg on June 18, and attacking as part of the initial assaults on Southern lines at that city below Richmond. The New Yorkers experienced considerable combat in the long siege at Petersburg before the breakthrough of early April 1865 which led to the capture of the Confederate capital and the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. The carpenter received a 15-day leave in January 1865 because of a family affliction, permitting the grey-eyed father of two to sponsor the baptism of his three month old niece Helene Hunt at St. Paul’s Church, a welcome affirmation of life and faith in contrast to daily encounters with death, disease and deprivation on the Virginia battlefields. Briefly transferred to the New York 10<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry in early June, Corporal Hunt (promoted in March 1865), was mustered out of the service with an honorable discharge on June 30, returning to his parish, his trade, his recollections of the war and his family.

Over the next 45 years, the former corporal’s modest life developed around St. Paul’s, witnessing the inexorable transformation of the area from the rural character of his boyhood to an industrialized district by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The carpenter lived on South Fourth Avenue, a half mile from the stone and brick church, and the centrality of the parish to Hunt’s life is documented across the church records -- he and Caroline’s three children were baptized by Father Coffey; he sponsored other young congregants for baptism, assisted the rector with religious services, directed the Sunday school for forty years, sat on the vestry, the church’s ruling board, for 58 years, and capped his involvement as senior warden, the lay leader of the parish, for 17 years.

Hunt’s religious faith fused with pride in his military service, and it’s not surprising that he served as chaplain of Farnsworth Post 170, of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veterans’ organization based at the church. Stephen Hunt joined 150 veterans from across southern Westchester County enrolled in the Farnsworth unit, sustaining the memory of shared sacrifice and camaraderie, conducting funerals for comrades and providing financial assistance to widows. Grand Army of the Republic chapters emerged as critical local bases of the Republican Party across the northern states in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America, reflected in Hunt’s role as a ward committeeman, hosting paper-ballot primaries in his home, among other functions. The 8<sup>th</sup> heavies corporal also remained in military uniform, on call, with the New York National Guard.

Hunt’s part in the Union army’s victory over the South helped sustain the former corporal in his twilight years, receiving a pension beginning in 1890, and obtaining his last monthly payment of \$20 (about \$500 in today’s money), days before passing August 10, 1910, at age 81. Among his surviving three children was Stephen, who lived with his octogenarian father and practiced carpentry. A humble marble veterans’ stone marks his burial location in the St. Paul’s cemetery.



**Farnsworth Post 170, G.A.R., at St. Paul's Church, c. 1890.**